United Nations S/2015/726

Security Council

Distr.: General
21 September 2015

Original: English

Letter dated 18 September 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

I have the honour to transmit to you the attached letter from the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (see annex).

I would be most grateful if you would have the present letter and its annex circulated as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Matthew **Rycroft**

15-15972 (E) 051015

Please recycle

Annex to the letter dated 18 September 2015 from the Permanent Representative of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On behalf of the National Coalition of Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces, it is with grave concern that I draw your attention to the growing toll of the Syrian conflict and its impact on the global refugee crisis. As Member States work to stem the exodus from Syria, it is vital that the Security Council take the comprehensive action needed to solve the ongoing crisis in Syria and work with urgency to provide civilians the protection they desperately need, both inside and outside of Syria.

Since the start of the Syrian crisis, the United Nations and its implementing agencies, operating under the mandate of Security Council resolutions 2139 (2014), 2165 (2014) and 2191 (2014), have provided lifesaving assistance to millions of Syrians in need. Tragically, however, such efforts have not succeeded in resolving the humanitarian catastrophe inside Syria or in stemming the flow of Syrians who are desperately fleeing the violence. To the contrary, Syrians are being killed, starved and barrel-bombed in record numbers.

At the heart of the escalating crisis is the Syrian regime's growing desperation and its increasing reliance on indiscriminate aerial weapons. Since the start of the Syrian uprising in 2011, the Syrian regime has steadily increased its use of aerial shelling and barrel bombs so that, today, aerial bombardment is the leading cause of civilian deaths in Syria, accounting for between 50 and 65 per cent of all civilian deaths in 2015, according to data compiled by the Violations Documentation Centre in Syria.

The emergence of indiscriminate aerial bombardment as the Syrian regime's favourite weapon of choice has made daily life in Syria a nightmare. In addition to killing more than 18,000 civilians, aerial bombardment has made residential areas unliveable. Homes, marketplaces, schools, medical facilities and places of worship have been barrel-bombed to the ground. In Rif Daimashq, eastern Ghouta, Idlib, Aleppo and Dayr al-Zawr, entire towns, villages and cities have been decimated, while those who stay within them live with the knowledge that they can be bombed at any time and in any place without warning and without repercussions.

As the Secretary-General stated on 16 September 2015, "People facing barrel bombs and brutality in their country will continue to seek life in another." For millions of Syrians, exodus is not a choice; it is the only way to survive. As a result, more than 4.2 million Syrians have now fled their country. The vast majority have found refuge in the region, but Syria's neighbours can no longer cope. With Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey under growing strain, many Syrians now view Europe as their only hope.

Too much of Europe has, however, failed to show Syrian refugees the basic decency they deserve and that international law on refugees, including the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees, requires. While Germany has shown great leadership in defining responsible action towards refugees, too few countries have followed. In addition to erecting a fence along its border with Serbia, Hungary has seen its riot police officers attack innocent refugees with batons, water cannons and tear gas. In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, police have used stun grenades to prevent refugees from attempting to cross the border into the country from Greece. In the Czech Republic, refugees have been labelled like cattle. Throughout Southern Europe,

criminals and smugglers operate with impunity, attacking and exploiting those who are most vulnerable.

While much of Europe has a long tradition of providing safe refuge to people in need, too many States are failing to provide unimpeded access for people in need of protection. The result is horrifying. Earlier this month, the bodies of two Syrian brothers only 3 and 5 years old arrived dead on Turkish shores. They are just two of the thousands of Syrians who have paid with their lives to flee the brutality inflicted by a Government they did not choose and a war they did not start. The news of their deaths came just days after the bodies of 71 refugees were found in a truck abandoned on an Austrian motorway.

The growing frequency with which Syrian refugees are dying on European soil and shores demands a comprehensive response by the Security Council. The crisis in Syria is no longer a Syrian problem. It is a global problem in search of a global solution, first and foremost from members of the Council. To stem the exodus of Syrians from their country, it is critical that the Council work with urgency to:

- Develop a plan to receive, process and compassionately resettle refugees fairly;
- Develop regional plans to create legal routes to Europe and elsewhere so that criminal traffickers are undercut and deaths are prevented along the journey;
- Raise funds to ensure that there is greater structural support for neighbouring countries so that they can better cope with refugees; and, above all;
- Tackle the root cause of the refugee crisis by providing in-country protection for Syrian civilians through the enforcement of a no-fly zone in order to create the conditions for their safe return.

The enforcement of a no-fly zone will stop the leading cause of civilian deaths across Syria and eliminate the main driver of refugees from their country to Europe and elsewhere. It will deny extremists a major recruiting tool, by demonstrating that the international community is prepared to protect all Syrian civilians from harm and is taking concrete steps to save their lives. It will also make a political settlement in Syria more likely by altering the Syrian Government's assessment of the battlefield once its forces are denied their most lethal weapon.

A political settlement to the conflict remains the chief ambition of the Syrian National Coalition. We continue to work with the Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Syria to implement the Geneva communiqué. We are deeply alarmed, however, by the recent actions of the Russian Government, which has increased its military support for the Assad dictatorship, reportedly providing naval infantry forces, battle tanks, artillery and other equipment that will undoubtedly be used to aid and abet Assad's killing machine. This unwarranted intervention by a veto-wielding member of the Security Council makes a peaceful resolution to the conflict less likely and is wholly at odds with the will of the Syrian people. Now more than ever we need international action that protects civilians, not reckless meddling that increases the killing. As the refugee crisis and threat of extremism continue to escalate and threaten global security, the onus is on the Council to take practical, enforceable steps to bring an end to this conflict. If the Council is unable to address the most serious security threat facing the world today, then it is incumbent upon Member States to act to uphold international law and protect our people.

(*Signed*) Najib **Ghadbian**
Special Representative to the United Nations